

Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary Coastal Discovery Center at San Simeon Bay



"The interface of land and sea is unique, drawing people for its rich bounty, economic opportunity, recreation and inspiration. Protection of these special places preserves them for use and enjoyment for generations to come."
—Mission Statement, Interpretive Planning Team

As proposed by its Draft Management Plan, the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary is expanding opportunities for in-depth sanctuary interpretation to geographically diverse audiences through the development of several small regional interpretive facilities, or “storefront” visitor centers.

Background

In 2004, the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary (MBNMS) and the San Luis Obispo Coast District of California State Parks (State Parks) began development of a cooperative use plan for an existing building at William Randolph Hearst Memorial State Beach at San Simeon.

The facility’s primary function is interpretation, education and outreach about natural and cultural resources in coastal California, from Cambria to Big Sur. Secondary goals include providing information to the public about local contacts for activities, food and lodging in the area. The building includes office space that serves as the MBNMS southern region office. The building also includes a small meeting/training area.

Location

San Simeon is located approximately 100 miles south of Monterey, and 45 miles north of San Luis Obispo, in central California. It is approximately 250 miles (equidistant) from Los Angeles and San Francisco.

William Randolph Hearst Memorial State Beach (Hearst State Beach) is located across from Hearst Castle State Historic Monument on California State Highway 1 in San Simeon. This portion of Highway 1 is a designated National Scenic Byway by the U.S.

Department of Transportation. Hearst State Beach receives 150,000 visitors per year. Most visitation occurs from Memorial Day to Labor Day. The park is located on San Simeon Bay, and includes a pier, parking lot, public restrooms, picnic tables and a kayak rental vendor.



Building at Hearst State Beach with pier and ocean.

San Simeon Point and the cove at San Simeon Bay have a rich history of human use, including habitation by local tribes of American Indians, a whaling station at San Simeon Point, and use of the cove as a harbor for import and export, commercial and recreational fishing and other activities including yachting, kayaking, surfing, and diving. The historic Sebastian’s General Store (est. 1874), and a historic post office are located nearby. The Piedras Blancas Light Station, established as an aid to navigation in 1875, is located 8 miles to the north.

Despite its rich cultural and natural history, no interpretive facility currently exists, other than Hearst Castle itself, to inform the public of the historic, cultural and natural history of the San Simeon area.

Facility

The entire building is approximately 1500 sq feet. Half of the building houses the MBNMS Southern Region Field Office, while the other half contains the ~800 square foot Coastal Discovery Center. The surrounding park offers abundant opportunities for signage, outdoor exhibits, and educational activities. Outdoor exhibits and signs are included in the interpretive plan, and classroom education programs and kits are in the development stage.

Interpretive Planning

In January 2004, a working group formed to develop the interpretive plan for the Coastal Discovery Center. The exhibit design team, Jennifer and Scott Chambliss, was hired for exhibit design, fabrication and installation. The mandates of both MBNMS and State Parks reflect the agencies' commitment to the protection of natural and cultural resources, so the theme of the facility is "Connecting Land and Sea." Educational programs for school groups and adults will be developed to enhance the exhibits.

Timeline Update: Fabrication has begun on the exhibits, and completion is expected in July 2006. A grand opening event is tentatively set for July 22, 2006.

Exhibits

The main interpretive themes and the exhibits associated with them are described below.

Resource Protection. Emphasizing the important role MBNMS and State Parks play in protecting natural and cultural resources, exhibits focused on resource protection and stewardship include "Partners in Protection," "Watersheds," "Tidepools" and "Wildlife Viewing."

Orientation. Due to its relatively isolated location on the California coast, orientation is important for all visitors to learn where they are as well as where other sanctuaries and state parks are located. Maps are included in the exhibits "Partners in Protection," "The Deep Sea," "Elephant Seals," and on exterior signs.

Recreation. Both MBNMS and State Parks encourage recreational use and public enjoyment of parks and sanctuaries. Recreational activities are encouraged along with strong messages about stewardship and responsible wildlife viewing in the exhibits "Watersheds," "Elephant Seals," "Tidepools" "Wildlife Viewing" and on exterior signs.

Maritime Heritage. Both agencies are dedicated to protection of cultural resources. Human uses of the land and maritime resources are highlighted in the exhibits "History of San Simeon Cove, and "The Deep Sea," which reports the history of shipwrecks in nearby waters.